

"Be Yourself"

By Roy Milton Iliff

Mack, the Casting Director, and the Girl With the Cool, Green Eyes.

"No, Flippo," that was the way Bishop, casting director for the H-B Film Company, always addressed the second person singular of the genus flappers. "No, Flippo; we ain't got a thing. Full up on young ladies and stars and such, and I wouldn't think of offering you anything less."

"Now, isn't that too bad," drawled the girl with the cool, green eyes. "And there just aren't such splendid opportunities here. The only place where she wouldn't promote Janitors to casting directors as quickly as they must have promoted you." Then she bathed him in a wide, sweet smile, turned on her heel and undulated out.

"Say, now, it," I says, "but you see, she don't know it."

"Guess not," he agreed. "Probably a newcomer and not up on who's who around the studios."

"That may be," I says, "but she's got the right system for finding out."

"Then I'll go out to follow Miss Green-eyes. I had an idea she might be interesting."

I caught her waiting for a street car on the boulevard. "Pardon me," I says, "but could I have one word with you?"

She looked me over with a slow look.

"One word is right," she says. "And that word is gift." And she stamped it in with her foot—Wham!

"Excuse me, lady," I bleats. "You've got me wrong. I'm a casting director and I thought I might be able to use you."

"Oh," she says, smiling a little. "You're one of the men that get people into the pictures?"

"Well, I says, "mostly I keep 'em from in, but now and then let 'em slip in."

"You talk my language," she says, turning on the full voltage of her smile. "What's your studio, and at what hour do you have your back turned?"

"The Beaux Arts. And the casting director's shanty at 2 p.m. The password is 'Janitor.'"

And that's how Mollie Medford broke into the movies.

At first she had been but that she might be anything but Mollie Medford. "Be yourself!" That was her motto, and she had the odd idea that she ought to act in a picture just like she would in real life.

Another thing that didn't help her any was her habit of wanting to know what everything was about and why. Little Frank Steele told her how that went, one day. He'd been generating enough heat to make a fat blue picture he was doing a fat blue how to make up, and all that, and when he got ready to rehearse the scene told her what to do, just as plain as anything. "Now, you see that old man's got his eye on you," he said. "That's right; he's your father, who has been murdered. You rush on, stop and register horror, then rush to the bed and fall over his body, weeping. Get me?"

She studied the scene a minute. "But why has he been murdered? What kind of father was he, and what kind of daughter am I?"

Frank snorted. "Gosh! I'm not asking you to act the whole play. You're just doing this one bit in this one scene."

"I know—but don't you think I could do it better if I knew more about him and more about the girl I'm supposed to be?"

"No. You'd do it like you think it out, but I'm the one that's getting paid to do the thinking."

Makes sense, don't it? But don't you know, she wanted to argue about it. Yes, argue!

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GUSS you can see now why she never got beyond "atmosphere" and little bits of general business that didn't call for any real acting. She was stupendous, though, when she got on, when she couldn't get anything on the lot she would go around to the office and do typewriter sonatas that sounded like rain on the roof. On top of that, she got to be something of a "wiz" at makeup, and the assistant director found her handy when they were working gags of extras in costume stuff.

"Oh, I'm versatile, I am," she said to me one day. "Good at everything, but the one thing I came here to do."

"May I ask you better, the particular thing?" I suggested. "If you'd spend less time telling the directors how you want to do it, and more time trying to do it the way they want it done."

"Mack, I could," she admits. "But look what the directors would be missing. They'd never know that they'd been doing it wrong."

"Great Caesar's Ghost! Are you trying to be one of them, too?"

"These high-brows that are trying to reform and refine the movies so that 99 per cent of the people won't know what they're about."

She shook her head. "Not me. But what are they about?"

Now, I ask you—what could you do with a girl like that? And she'd

talk that way to anybody that was big enough to hit back; directors, stars, leads, assistant directors—anybody at all.

Another thing I noticed was that there was only two kinds of people around the studio: the kind that was all wrong and needed spanking, and the kind that was all wronged and needed mothering. A lot of the time she was mothering some sad-eyed mistake that had come along, and the last time she never was too busy doing that to stop and spank some spoiled darling that riled her. I begged her to lay off of it. I knew that sooner or later she would spank somebody who would tell mamma meaning the Old Mack Himself—after that, I knew where she'd be at. But no, she wouldn't listen, and then came the day when she tried to spank Adolpho Antonio.

Adolpho, who had been borrowed from the *Ne Plus Ultra* for one picture, had more of a temperament than an onion has layers.

Boy!—Yes! Well, on the second day he worked he came on a scene and found a character there wearing a purple robe. Now, it seems that purple was the one color that made his heart go pitter-patter. He sat on a bench and covered his eyes with a trembling hand. "Take that man off," he moaned. "Take him out of my sight or I won't be able to do a thing!"

Mollie happened to be sitting on the same bench, he flopped on, and she immediately lifted her voice in a long wail: "Mamma—mamma!" she howled.

"That blue sky! Take it away—take it away and make it cloudy! If you don't, I can't cry a tear!"

That little stunt cost exactly nine thousand dollars to Adolpho. A few away home and stayed there until everybody from the Old Man Himself to Yours Humbly had kissed his hands and wept on his feet. The Old Man called me into his office after Adolpho went back to work and told me just what he thought of Mollie. He also told me to tell her as much of it as I dared, and then fire her. Yes, me!

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ORDERS being orders, of course I went. But knowing Mollie like I did, I decided it might be best to tell her to tell them to go to hell and stay back at it. But your younger women—Your Paris dolls—push! None of them is an inch deep at her mental flood-tide. Actresses—bunk!

"See here," he says, "what's the matter with you, anyhow?"

"Nothing, I guess. But we're pals-like, and don't think you ought to ask me to fire her. Do it yourself."

The boss commenced rumbling and bubbling down inside and I thought he was working up one of his fits. But he was just winding up a laugh, after which he gobbled: "I'd be a criminal to turn you over to the mercies of a cruel, unfeling world . . . Your resignation is declined—and yours, too. Now get out of here!"

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AFTER leaving the boss' office that day, I got to thinking about that bluff of mine if he fired Mollie, and the thing that tattered me was the down-deep feeling that I'd really done it.

So, one day, when Mollie said something about what a "fliver" she had been, I part of her was trying to do, I took that as my cue.

"Mollie," I says, touching her hand timidly, "We're both kind of flivers, ain't we?"

"I guess so. Why?"

"I'm thinking, Mollie—er, that is, don't you think that—that two flivers' teamed-up are better than one?"

"No," she says, "but I get a smile out of the idea of you making the dear public pay out good money to see it spanked, and another smile out of the sense of humor."

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